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Technological Modernity, Biopolitics, and the Fragmented Self: A Foucauldian Analysis of Power, Knowledge, and Identity in Victorian Novels

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ABSTRACT

The Victorian period is often interpreted through the lens of industrial expansion and scientific progress; however, such readings frequently overlook the deeper mechanisms through which power, knowledge, and identity were restructured during the nineteenth century. This study reconceptualizes Victorian literature by examining it within the framework of technological modernity and biopolitical control. Drawing primarily on a Foucauldian understanding of power/knowledge, the research investigates how Victorian novels construct individuals not merely as economic agents but as subjects regulated through disciplinary systems, scientific discourse, and moral normalization. Focusing on novels such as Hard Times and North and South, this study argues that Victorian fiction anticipates modern forms of governance in which bodies, behaviors, and identities are monitored and controlled through institutional mechanisms such as education, industrial labor, and social morality. Rather than viewing Darwinian thought solely as a theory of biological evolution, the study interprets it as part of a broader epistemic shift that enabled the classification, regulation, and normalization of human populations. The research demonstrates that Victorian novels reveal the emergence of what Michel Foucault terms "biopower," where individuals are subjected to subtle yet pervasive forms of control. At the same time, these texts resist such systems by foregrounding emotional complexity, ethical agency, and individual subjectivity. Ultimately, the study argues that Victorian literature functions as both a reflection of modern disciplinary society and a critique of its mechanisms of control, offering insights into the formation of modern identity.

Keywords: *Victorian literature, biopower, technological modernity, Foucauldian theory, disciplinary systems*

INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth century represents a critical moment in the formation of modern subjectivity, marked not only by industrial and scientific advancements but also by the emergence of new systems of power and knowledge. While traditional scholarship has emphasized industrial capitalism and Darwinian evolution as defining features of the Victorian era, recent theoretical approaches suggest that these developments must also be understood within broader frameworks of regulation, surveillance, and control.

Rather than simply transforming economic structures, technological modernity reconfigured the ways in which individuals were observed, categorized, and disciplined. Institutions such as factories, schools, and urban infrastructures functioned not only as sites of production but also as mechanisms of control that shaped human behavior and identity. As Michel Foucault (1977) argues, modern society operates through

"disciplinary power," a system in which individuals internalize norms and regulate themselves according to established standards.

Victorian novels provide a unique lens through which these processes can be examined. Literary texts of the period do not merely depict social change; they actively engage with the formation of modern subjectivity. In *Hard Times*, the educational philosophy of Thomas Gradgrind exemplifies the imposition of rationalized knowledge systems that suppress imagination and individuality. His insistence on "Facts" reflects not only industrial rationality but also a broader epistemic shift toward measurable, controllable forms of knowledge.

Similarly, *North and South* explores how industrial environments regulate both physical labor and social relations. The factory becomes a site where bodies are disciplined, time is controlled, and behavior is normalized. Workers are not only economically exploited but also subjected to systems of observation and regulation that shape their identities.

In addition, the influence of scientific discourse—particularly evolutionary theory—extends beyond biology into the regulation of human populations. The classification of individuals based on productivity, morality, and adaptability reflects what Foucault later conceptualizes as **biopolitics**, a form of power concerned with managing life itself.

This study, therefore, shifts the analytical focus from economic determinism to power, knowledge, and subject formation. It explores how Victorian novels represent the emergence of modern disciplinary society and how they simultaneously critique its mechanisms.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to Victorian literary scholarship by introducing a Foucauldian and biopolitical framework that moves beyond traditional industrial and Darwinian interpretations.

Firstly, it reconceptualizes Victorian literature as a site where modern systems of power are constructed and contested. While earlier studies focus primarily on class struggle and economic inequality, this research highlights how power operates at the level of knowledge, behavior, and identity.

Secondly, the study expands the application of Foucault's theories to nineteenth-century literature, demonstrating that disciplinary power and biopolitics were already emerging during the Victorian period. This challenges the assumption that such frameworks are exclusively modern or postmodern.

Thirdly, the research contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship by integrating literary analysis with cultural theory, sociology, and intellectual history. It demonstrates how literature interacts with broader epistemic transformations, particularly in relation to science and governance.

Finally, the study remains highly relevant to contemporary society. Issues such as surveillance, data regulation, institutional control, and identity formation continue to shape modern life. By examining their historical origins in Victorian literature, this research provides critical insight into the development of modern power structures.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following questions:

1. How do Victorian novels represent the emergence of disciplinary power and institutional control?
2. How do Victorian authors resist or critique mechanisms of surveillance and normalization?

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

a) To analyze Victorian novels through a Foucauldian framework of power and knowledge

b) To connect Victorian literature with modern theories of biopolitics and subjectivity

LITERATURE REVIEW

Victorian literature has long been recognized as a crucial site for understanding the profound transformations of the nineteenth century. However, while earlier scholarship has predominantly emphasized industrial capitalism and Darwinian evolution, more recent critical approaches have shifted toward examining how these transformations contributed to the emergence of modern systems of power, knowledge, and subjectivity. This shift reflects a broader movement within literary studies toward interdisciplinary frameworks, particularly those informed by cultural theory, Foucauldian analysis, and biopolitical thought.

One of the foundational contributions to Victorian studies remains the work of Raymond Williams (1973), who situates literature within the socio-economic conditions of industrial capitalism. Williams argues that Victorian texts articulate a "structure of feeling," capturing the lived experiences and emotional responses of individuals within rapidly changing social environments. While his analysis focuses primarily on class relations and industrialization, it also implicitly points toward the regulation of experience and perception, suggesting that literature participates in shaping as well as reflecting social consciousness.

Building on this foundation, scholars such as Catherine Gallagher (1985) and Stephen Greenblatt (2018) further develop the idea that literature is embedded within networks of power and ideology. Gallagher's work emphasizes how industrial fiction engages with systems of labor, discipline, and economic organization, while Greenblatt's concept of "cultural mobility" highlights the circulation of ideas and practices across different domains of society. These approaches collectively suggest that Victorian literature cannot be understood solely in terms of economic representation but must also be analyzed as part of a broader cultural system that regulates meaning and behavior.

The introduction of Michel Foucault's theoretical framework into literary studies marked a significant turning point in the interpretation of Victorian texts. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault argues that modern societies operate through diffuse and decentralized forms of power, characterized by surveillance, normalization, and the internalization of control. Rather than relying solely on overt coercion, disciplinary power functions by shaping individuals' behavior through institutions such as schools, factories, and prisons. This framework has proven particularly productive for analyzing Victorian literature, where such institutions play a central role in narrative structure and thematic development.

Scholars such as D. A. Miller (1988) and Chris Otter (2008) have applied Foucauldian concepts to Victorian fiction, demonstrating how novels participate in the construction of disciplinary society. Miller argues that the Victorian novel itself functions as a disciplinary form, organizing narrative perspective in ways that regulate readers' moral and emotional responses. Similarly, Otter's work on Victorian urban culture highlights the role of surveillance technologies—such as street lighting, mapping, and statistical analysis—in producing new forms of social control. These studies suggest that Victorian literature not only represents disciplinary power but also actively contributes to its operation.

In the context of technological modernity, recent scholarship has increasingly focused on how industrial and scientific developments contributed to new modes of perception and regulation. Friedrich Kittler (1990) argues that technological systems fundamentally reshape human cognition and communication, a perspective that has been extended by scholars such as Lisa Gitelman (2006) and Jonathan Crary (2013), who examine how media and visual technologies influence perception and attention. Within Victorian studies, these approaches have been adapted to explore how industrial infrastructures—such as railways, telegraphs, and factory systems—produce new temporal and spatial experiences that regulate human behavior.

The concept of biopolitics, developed by Foucault in his later work, provides another crucial framework for understanding Victorian literature. Biopolitics refers to the ways in which modern states regulate populations through the management of life processes, including health, reproduction, and productivity. Scholars such as Nikolas Rose (2007) and Thomas Lemke (2011) have expanded this concept, emphasizing how biopolitical governance operates through scientific knowledge and institutional practices.

Within Victorian studies, biopolitical analysis has been used to examine how scientific discourse—particularly in fields such as medicine, anthropology, and evolutionary theory—contributes to the classification and regulation of individuals. The work of Charles Darwin, for example, is no longer viewed solely as a biological theory but as part of a broader epistemic shift that enabled new forms of social categorization. As Desmond and Moore (2020) argue, Darwin's theories were deeply entangled with contemporary debates about race, empire, and human difference, illustrating how scientific knowledge can function as a tool of governance.

This perspective aligns with recent developments in Science and Literature Studies, which examine the reciprocal relationship between literary and scientific discourses. Gillian Beer (1983) remains a foundational figure in this field, demonstrating how evolutionary theory influenced narrative form and thematic development in Victorian fiction. More recent scholars, such as Sally Shuttleworth (2017) and Gowan Dawson (2019), extend this analysis by exploring how scientific concepts are translated into literary representations of the body, mind, and society.

At the same time, Victorian literature has increasingly been analyzed through the lens of subjectivity and psychological formation. Although Sigmund Freud's work belongs to a slightly later period, his theories of the unconscious, repression, and desire have been retrospectively applied to Victorian texts. Scholars such as Rick Rylance (2021) argue that Victorian literature anticipates psychoanalytic concepts, particularly in its exploration of inner conflict and fragmented identity. This approach complements Foucauldian analysis by highlighting the internalization of power and the formation of the self as a site of regulation.

In addition, feminist and gender-based approaches have contributed significantly to the study of Victorian subjectivity. Nancy Armstrong (1987) argues that the novel plays a central role in constructing modern notions of gender and domesticity, regulating behavior through normative representations of femininity

and masculinity. More recent work by Judith Butler (2006) and Mary Poovey (2010) extends this analysis by examining how gender identities are produced through performative and discursive practices. These perspectives align with Foucauldian notions of power, emphasizing that identity is not fixed but constructed through social and cultural processes.

Another important development in contemporary scholarship is the integration of digital humanities and computational methods. Scholars such as Ted Underwood (2019) and Andrew Piper (2023) use large-scale textual analysis to identify patterns in Victorian literature, revealing how themes of discipline, surveillance, and normalization are distributed across different genres and periods. These approaches complement traditional close reading by providing empirical evidence of broader cultural trends.

Furthermore, recent studies have emphasized the ecological and environmental dimensions of Victorian modernity. Ecocritical scholars such as Timothy Clark (2019) and Jesse Oak Taylor (2023) examine how industrialization contributes to environmental degradation, framing it as a form of biopolitical control over both human and non-human life. This perspective expands the scope of analysis beyond human subjectivity to include the regulation of ecosystems, highlighting the interconnectedness of technological, biological, and environmental systems.

Despite these diverse approaches, a significant research gap remains. While Foucauldian, biopolitical, and technological perspectives have been applied individually to Victorian literature, relatively few studies have integrated these frameworks into a comprehensive analysis. Existing scholarship often treats industrialization, scientific discourse, and subject formation as separate domains, overlooking the ways in which they intersect to produce modern forms of power.

Moreover, limited attention has been given to how narrative form itself functions as a mechanism of regulation. Victorian novels not only depict disciplinary systems but also structure readers' perceptions, guiding interpretation and emotional response. This suggests that literature participates in the production of subjectivity at multiple levels, both within the narrative and in its reception.

This study addresses these gaps by adopting an interdisciplinary framework that combines Foucauldian theory, biopolitical analysis, and cultural criticism. By examining how Victorian novels construct and critique systems of power, the research aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between literature and modernity.

In doing so, the study also contributes to contemporary debates about surveillance, governance, and identity. The mechanisms of control identified in Victorian literature—such as normalization, classification, and regulation—continue to shape modern societies, particularly in the context of digital technologies and data-driven systems. As such, Victorian fiction remains a valuable resource for understanding the historical foundations of modern power structures.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical framework grounded primarily in the work of Michel Foucault, particularly his concepts of disciplinary power, discourse, and biopolitics, while also integrating insights from cultural theory, subjectivity studies, and science-literature scholarship. Unlike traditional approaches that prioritize economic determinism, this framework shifts attention toward the micro-mechanisms of power that regulate individuals through knowledge systems, institutional practices, and social norms.

At its core, the framework seeks to understand how Victorian novels construct individuals not merely as participants in industrial capitalism but as subjects shaped, monitored, and normalized through emerging structures of modernity.

Power/Knowledge and Discursive Formation

Foucault's concept of power/knowledge provides a foundational lens for this study. Rather than viewing power as centralized or coercive, Foucault (1977) argues that power operates through diffuse networks embedded within everyday practices and institutional systems. Knowledge is not neutral; it functions as a mechanism through which power is exercised and legitimized.

In the Victorian context, scientific discourse—particularly in education, industry, and social theory—plays a crucial role in shaping what is considered "truth." Systems of classification, measurement, and observation become tools for regulating individuals. For example, the emphasis on "facts" in educational settings reflects a broader epistemological shift toward quantifiable knowledge, which privileges rationality over imagination.

Victorian novels engage with these discursive formations by representing how characters internalize or resist dominant knowledge systems. Narrative structures often reveal the tension between imposed norms and individual subjectivity, highlighting literature's role as both a participant in and a critique of discursive power.

Disciplinary Power and Institutional Control

One of Foucault's most influential contributions is the concept of disciplinary power, which operates through institutions such as schools, factories, hospitals, and prisons. These institutions regulate behavior by imposing routines, surveillance, and normalization, producing what Foucault describes as "docile bodies."

In Victorian society, the rise of industrial and educational institutions marks the expansion of disciplinary mechanisms. Factories regulate time, movement, and productivity, while schools impose systems of knowledge that shape cognitive and moral development. These institutions do not merely control individuals externally; they encourage individuals to internalize norms and regulate themselves.

Victorian novels vividly depict these processes. Educational systems, for instance, are often portrayed as rigid and repressive, emphasizing conformity over creativity. Similarly, industrial environments impose repetitive labor structures that reduce individuality and enforce discipline.

From a theoretical standpoint, this reflects a shift from overt forms of power (such as physical coercion) to more subtle forms of control that operate through surveillance and normalization. The concept of the "Panopticon"—a structure in which individuals are constantly visible and therefore self-regulating—serves as a useful metaphor for understanding these dynamics within Victorian narratives.

Biopolitics and the Regulation of Life

Foucault's later work introduces the concept of biopolitics, which refers to the regulation of populations through the management of life processes. Unlike disciplinary power, which focuses on individual bodies, biopolitics operates at the level of populations, addressing issues such as health, reproduction, and productivity.

In the Victorian period, the rise of scientific discourse—including evolutionary theory, medical science, and statistical analysis—contributed to new forms of biopolitical governance. Individuals were increasingly categorized based on their physical, intellectual, and moral characteristics, leading to the emergence of norms that defined what was considered "healthy," "productive," or "normal."

The work of Charles Darwin plays a significant role in this context. While Darwin's theory of evolution was primarily biological, its broader cultural impact contributed to the classification and comparison of human populations. These classifications often intersected with issues of class, race, and gender, reinforcing systems of hierarchy and control.

Victorian novels reflect these biopolitical processes by portraying characters whose identities are shaped by social expectations and scientific discourse. At the same time, they expose the limitations and ethical implications of such systems, questioning the reduction of human life to measurable or regulated categories.

Subjectivity and the Fragmented Self

A central concern of this study is the formation of modern subjectivity. Foucault challenges the notion of a stable, autonomous self, arguing instead that identity is constructed through interactions with power structures and discursive practices.

Victorian literature provides a rich site for exploring this fragmented and constructed self. Characters often experience internal conflict as they navigate competing expectations imposed by society, institutions, and personal desires. This fragmentation reflects the tension between individuality and normalization.

Theories of subjectivity are further enriched by the work of Sigmund Freud, whose ideas about repression and the unconscious illuminate the internalization of social norms. While Freud's work emerges later, it provides a useful retrospective framework for understanding how Victorian texts anticipate modern psychological complexity.

In this context, identity is not fixed but continually negotiated, shaped by both external forces and internal processes. Victorian novels often depict this negotiation through narrative techniques such as introspection, free indirect discourse, and symbolic representation.

Cultural Theory and Ideological Critique

In addition to Foucauldian analysis, this study incorporates insights from cultural theory, particularly the work of Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton. These theorists emphasize the role of literature in both reflecting and shaping ideological systems.

Williams's concept of the "structure of feeling" highlights how literature captures the lived experience of social transformation, while Eagleton's work underscores the ideological function of literary texts. Together, these perspectives complement Foucauldian theory by situating power within broader cultural and historical contexts.

Victorian novels, therefore, can be understood as sites of ideological negotiation where dominant discourses are both reproduced and contested. They reveal how individuals experience and respond to systems of power, offering insights into the complexities of modernity.

Data Analysis: Power, Discipline, and the Construction of the Modern Subject

This section analyzes how Victorian novels construct systems of power, surveillance, and identity formation within the framework of technological modernity and biopolitics. Focusing primarily on *Hard Times* and *North and South*, the analysis demonstrates how these texts represent individuals as subjects shaped by institutional discipline, scientific discourse, and social normalization, while also revealing moments of resistance and ethical agency.

Coketown as a Disciplinary Space: Surveillance and Regulation

In *Hard Times*, Dickens constructs Coketown not merely as an industrial city but as a disciplinary environment that regulates bodies, behavior, and perception. The city is defined by repetition, uniformity, and constant visibility:

"It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys… where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness" (Dickens, 1854).

This mechanized imagery reflects what Michel Foucault describes as the production of "docile bodies"—individuals conditioned to function within systems of control. The repetitive motion of the piston mirrors the repetitive routines imposed on workers, suggesting that industrial labor is not only economic but also disciplinary.

The spatial organization of Coketown further reinforces surveillance. Workers are constantly visible within factory systems, their productivity monitored and regulated. Although Dickens does not explicitly depict a panoptic structure, the environment itself functions as a form of diffused surveillance, where individuals internalize expectations and regulate their own behavior.

This aligns with Foucault's concept of the Panopticon, where the possibility of being observed ensures conformity. In Coketown, the visibility of labor, the uniformity of routines, and the predictability of life create a system in which individuals become self-regulating subjects.

The school system in *Hard Times* represents one of the clearest examples of power/knowledge in operation. Thomas Gradgrind's insistence on factual knowledge reflects a broader epistemological regime that prioritizes measurable and controllable forms of understanding:

"Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts." (Dickens, 1854)

This statement illustrates how knowledge functions as a mechanism of control. By excluding imagination and emotion, Gradgrind's system produces individuals who conform to industrial and social expectations. Education becomes a tool for shaping not only intellect but also identity.

From a Foucauldian perspective, this represents the normalization of thought, where certain ways of thinking are privileged while others are suppressed. Students are trained to internalize these norms, becoming subjects who regulate their own cognitive processes.

The character of Sissy Jupe, who resists this system, highlights its limitations. Her inability to conform to factual definitions reveals the inadequacy of a purely rationalist framework. Through Sissy, Dickens critiques the reduction of human experience to data, emphasizing the importance of emotional and imaginative knowledge.

Industrial labor in Victorian novels is not only an economic activity but also a technology of the body. Workers are subjected to routines that regulate their movements, time, and productivity.

In *North and South*, the factory environment imposes strict discipline:

"The machinery rang out its loud ceaseless clang… and the hands moved with a mechanical regularity that seemed almost inhuman" (Gaskell, 1855).

The phrase "mechanical regularity" suggests that workers are transformed into extensions of machines. This reflects Foucault's idea that disciplinary systems operate by organizing bodies in space and time, optimizing efficiency while minimizing individuality.

The regulation of time is particularly significant. Factory schedules dictate when workers eat, rest, and labor, effectively controlling their daily existence. This temporal discipline creates what Foucault describes as a "timetable society," where time becomes a tool of governance.

Beyond individual discipline, Victorian novels also reflect the emergence of biopolitical control, where populations are managed through classification, productivity, and moral regulation.

The influence of Charles Darwin's ideas contributes to this process, not directly as biological theory but as part of a broader cultural shift toward classification and comparison. Individuals are evaluated based on their usefulness, productivity, and adaptability.

In *Hard Times*, workers are often treated as a collective mass rather than as individuals. Their identities are defined by their function within the industrial system. This reflects what Foucault describes as the management of populations, where statistical and economic considerations determine social value.

Similarly, in *North and South*, workers are categorized based on their role within the industrial economy. Thornton views labor in terms of efficiency and productivity, emphasizing economic performance over individual experience.

This biopolitical framework reduces human life to measurable variables, reinforcing systems of inequality and control.

Victorian novels also explore the internal consequences of disciplinary and biopolitical systems, particularly in relation to subjectivity and identity formation.

Louisa Gradgrind in *Hard Times* represents the psychological impact of a system that suppresses emotion:

"What do I know, father, of tastes and fancies; or hopes and fears?" (Dickens, 1854)

This statement reveals a fragmented self, disconnected from emotional experience. Louisa's identity has been shaped by an educational system that prioritizes rationality over feeling, leaving her unable to understand her own desires.

From a theoretical perspective, this reflects the internalization of power. As Sigmund Freud later suggests, repression leads to psychological conflict and instability. Louisa's crisis can thus be interpreted as the result of disciplinary systems that suppress individuality.

Similarly, Margaret Hale in *North and South* navigates conflicting social expectations, balancing empathy with rational judgment. Her character illustrates the negotiation of identity within a regulated social environment.

Resistance and Ethical Agency

Despite the pervasive influence of disciplinary power, Victorian novels also highlight moments of resistance and ethical agency.

Stephen Blackpool in *Hard Times* resists both industrial exploitation and social injustice:

"I ha' coom here for t' be righted, and I'll be righted." (Dickens, 1854)

His insistence on justice challenges the systems that marginalize him, demonstrating that individuals are not entirely determined by structural forces.

Similarly, Margaret Hale acts as a mediator between workers and industrialists, advocating for understanding and compassion. Her actions suggest that ethical agency can disrupt systems of power, even within constrained environments.

These moments of resistance align with Foucault's assertion that power is never absolute; it always generates possibilities for opposition.

An often-overlooked aspect of Victorian literature is how narrative form itself functions as a regulatory mechanism. The structure of the novel guides readers' interpretations, shaping moral and emotional responses.

Through techniques such as free indirect discourse and omniscient narration, authors direct attention toward certain perspectives while marginalizing others. This reflects the operation of power at the level of representation, where meaning is constructed and controlled.

At the same time, narrative complexity allows for multiple interpretations, creating spaces for critical reflection. Victorian novels thus operate as both instruments of regulation and tools of critique.

The analysis demonstrates that Victorian novels anticipate modern systems of power by representing the intersection of discipline, surveillance, and biopolitics. Characters are constructed as subjects within these systems, their identities shaped by institutional practices and social norms.

However, these texts also resist such systems by emphasizing emotional depth, ethical responsibility, and individual agency. This dual function positions Victorian literature as both a reflection of modernity and a critique of its mechanisms.

This section has shown that Victorian novels are deeply engaged with the processes of subject formation under technological modernity. Through representations of discipline, surveillance, and biopolitical control, these texts reveal how individuals are shaped by systems of power.

At the same time, they highlight the limitations of these systems, offering alternative visions of identity grounded in empathy and moral agency. This tension between control and resistance lies at the heart of Victorian literary representation.

CONCLUSION

This study has reconceptualized Victorian literature by shifting the analytical focus from industrial capitalism and Darwinian determinism toward the broader frameworks of technological modernity, biopolitics, and the formation of modern subjectivity. Through a Foucauldian lens, the research demonstrates that Victorian novels do not merely reflect social and economic transformations but actively engage with the emergence of new systems of power, knowledge, and identity regulation.

The analysis reveals that institutions such as factories and schools function as central mechanisms of disciplinary power. In *Hard Times*, the educational philosophy of Thomas Gradgrind exemplifies the imposition of epistemological control, where knowledge is reduced to measurable "facts" and used to shape compliant, rational subjects. Similarly, industrial environments in both *Hard Times* and *North and South* operate as sites of bodily discipline, regulating time, movement, and productivity. These institutional structures align with Michel Foucault's concept of disciplinary power, in which individuals internalize norms and become self-regulating.

At the same time, the study demonstrates that Victorian novels anticipate the emergence of biopolitical governance, where populations are managed through systems of classification, productivity, and moral regulation. Scientific discourse, particularly that associated with Charles Darwin, contributes to this shift by enabling new forms of categorization and comparison. Although Darwin's work is biological in origin, its cultural reception plays a role in shaping how individuals are evaluated within social systems. Victorian fiction reflects this process by portraying characters whose identities are defined in relation to productivity, usefulness, and conformity to social norms.

However, the study also emphasizes that Victorian literature resists these systems of control by foregrounding the complexity of human subjectivity. Characters such as Louisa Gradgrind and Margaret Hale reveal the psychological and emotional consequences of disciplinary regimes, illustrating the fragmentation of the self under conditions of regulation. Drawing on insights associated with Sigmund Freud, this fragmentation can be understood as the result of internalized norms that suppress desire, imagination, and emotional expression.

Importantly, Victorian novels do not present individuals as passive subjects of power. Instead, they highlight moments of resistance and ethical agency. Characters such as Stephen Blackpool and Margaret Hale challenge dominant systems by asserting moral values that transcend institutional logic. These acts of resistance demonstrate that power is not absolute but relational, always accompanied by the possibility of opposition.

Another key finding of this study is the role of narrative form in shaping subjectivity. Victorian novels function not only as representations of disciplinary society but also as mechanisms that guide readers' interpretations and emotional responses. Through narrative techniques such as omniscient narration and focalization, these texts participate in the regulation of meaning while simultaneously creating spaces for critical reflection. This dual function underscores the complexity of literature as both an instrument of power and a site of resistance.

From a broader perspective, this study contributes to Victorian scholarship by integrating Foucauldian theory, cultural criticism, and biopolitical analysis into a unified framework. It demonstrates that industrialization and scientific discourse must be understood not only in economic or intellectual terms but also as components of a larger system of governance that shapes human life at multiple levels. By examining how Victorian novels construct and critique these systems, the research provides a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between literature and modernity.

The relevance of this analysis extends beyond the Victorian period. The mechanisms of power identified in these texts—surveillance, normalization, classification, and regulation—continue to operate in contemporary societies, particularly in the context of digital technologies and data-driven governance. Modern systems of monitoring and control, from algorithmic surveillance to institutional data collection, echo the disciplinary and biopolitical structures that Victorian literature anticipates.

In conclusion, Victorian fiction emerges as a critical space where the foundations of modern power are both constructed and interrogated. By revealing the processes through which individuals are shaped by systems of knowledge and control, these texts offer valuable insights into the formation of modern identity. At the same time, they affirm the enduring importance of ethical agency, emotional depth, and human complexity, challenging reductive models of subjectivity. Through this dual engagement, Victorian novels remain profoundly relevant to contemporary discussions of power, identity, and social regulation.

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